

WHCoA Post Event Summary Report

Name of Event: Fifth Annual Emerging Issues in Aging Videoconference: Improving Quality of Life

Date of Event: June 9, 2005

Number of Persons Attending: 275

Sponsoring Organization(s): James J. Peters VAMC Geriatric Research, Education And Clinical Center (formerly known as Bronx VAMC)
Consortium of New York Geriatric Education Centers

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Overview: This multi-site videoconference, hosted by the Veterans Administration, addressed a variety of quality of life issues for older adults, including elder abuse and mistreatment, nursing home life, and oral and dental hygiene.

Priority Issue #1: Elder abuse and neglect is a serious and prevalent problem that is estimated to affect 700,000 to 1.2 million older adults annually in this country. Only one in ten cases of elder abuse and neglect are reported. Abuse, neglect, exploitation and abandonment are actions that can result in elder mistreatment.

Barrier(s): There is a serious underreporting by clinical professionals, likely due to the lack of appropriate screening instruments. There is inadequate public awareness of signs of abuse and neglect.

Proposed Solution(s):

- Improve detection of abuse with caregivers as well as law enforcement professionals;
- Set markers in healthcare institutions (emergency rooms);
- Better case management with increased knowledge and skills through the provision of funding to educate and train law enforcement and healthcare professionals on mistreatment signs.

Priority Issue #2: The nursing home is recognized as a peculiarly unsuitable environment for people to experience the freedom, independence and privacy that are built into the American ethics. It is important to provide a home-like environment on nursing home units, which allows for the maintenance of residents' self-esteem, individuality and dignity, while promoting purpose and enjoyment in daily living.

Barrier(s): Staff may be unaware of the availability of financial and program resources, and there are a limited number of healthcare professionals in nursing home settings.

Proposed Solution(s):

- Develop forums for facilities to present quality of life programs to staff.
- Develop tools to assess the effectiveness of quality of life in extended care units.
- Increase funding for assessing conditions in nursing home settings and developing solutions to improve quality of life for residents.

Priority Issue #3: Oral healthcare should be made a priority in helping care for our nation's older adults. Too often these problems are underestimated, ignored or not detected until too late, resulting in serious disease and even death.

Barrier(s):

- Individual Barriers
 - Functionality level and medical status
 - Lack of education in oral health and previous patterns of dental utilization
 - Transportation and financial obstacles, including
 - The loss of dental insurance at retirement
 - The fact that Medicare does not cover dental services
 - Medicaid is only available for adults in some states
- Dentists' Barriers
 - Lack of experience/education, financial incentives, access to office
 - Homebound and institutionalized populations difficult to serve
 - Negative attitudes toward elderly and difficulty dealing with life-threatening issues and informed consent.

Proposed Solution(s):

- Increase education and training programs for older populations regarding the importance of oral and dental hygiene
- Promote incentives for dentists to treat older adults
- Broaden Medicare and Medicaid eligibility for dental services